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## **Shannon Satherley: Expanded Abstract**

### **Futures Research Symposium: Landscape Architecture Research Group**

**Australasian Educators of Landscape Architecture Workshop and Symposium, University of Melbourne 14-15 February, 2013**

#### ***Landscape Meaning and Design: A new case study methodology***

Understanding the effects of design interventions on the meanings people associate with landscapes is important to critical and ethical practice in landscape architecture. Case study research has become a common way researchers evaluate design interventions and related issues, with a standardised method promoted by the Landscape Architecture Foundation (LAF). However, the method is somewhat undeveloped for interpreting landscape meanings – something most commonly undertaken as historic landscape studies, but not as studies of design effect. This research proposes a new method for such interpretation, using a case study of Richard Haag's radical 1971 proposal for a new kind of park on the site of the former Seattle gas works.

The gas works was decommissioned in 1956 when electricity production switched to a new, 'cleaner' source and method. Many such 'post-industrial' sites are being decommissioned in similarly urbanised areas today, and landscape architects play a role in designing their new uses. Gas Works Park is listed in the US National Historic Register as having 'set a new precedent in landscape design,' and its maturity makes it perfect for a longitudinal evaluation of the effects a design intervention can have on the meanings people associate with such landscapes.

Landscape meanings have been theorised since Sauer coined the term 'cultural landscape' in 1925. A criticism of Sauerian cultural geography is that it describes but does not interpret landscape patterns and processes, which subsequent new cultural geographies, critical theories, phenomenological and performative approaches do. This new case study method both describes *and* interprets meanings associated with post-industrial landscapes, synthesising theoretical and methodological aspects from all these approaches. A narrative of Gas Works Park incorporating the 'standard' LAF case study elements is extended with this method's focal data: the public expressions of meanings associated with the park by local Seattleites, including the designer, a historian, park managers. Detailed questions are developed from the theoretical synthesis referred to above and asked of this data – as well as the landscape itself – taking 'soundings' of three periods in time: from park proposal to Haag's design (1962-71); to design implementation (1972-78); and the contemporary landscape (2009-12), to build a comparative narrative of changing meanings.

Preliminary findings suggest publicly expressed opinions about Gas Works Park have been shaped by local's positions on a spectrum of landscape perception: between landscape as an external object, to feeling themselves an integral part of landscape. The majority expressed opinions for or against visible industrial heritage in a contemporary urban landscape, and about what a park should or should not be. Through time, many opinions shifted toward understanding, acceptance and celebration of the post-industrial qualities of this landscape, after exposure to the design rationale and the site itself during and after construction and bioremediation.

The research to date suggests this taking of 'soundings' will build a rich narrative of the meanings associated with this landscape as it changed through design intervention. This new case study method may offer a robust means to critically interpret and evaluate designed landscapes, moving landscape architecture toward more culturally ethical and effective design interventions.